

Romania Dacia

Communist prisons: Fort XIII Jilava, Ramnicu-Sarat, Sighetu Marmatiei, Pitesti

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“The biggest victory of communism – a victory dramatically revealed after 1989 – was the creation of a man without memory, the new man brainwashed to not have any memory of who he was, or what was, or what he did before Communism.”

– extract from the Resistance and Victims of Communism Memorial

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“Even now at age 80, my wife tells me I wake up screaming at night – but I don’t remember any of it. Maybe I scream now because I never cried in prison” says Petre Tudosie, former student who spent 15 years in prison for anti-communist beliefs. Locked up in room 3 in the basement of Pitesti prison. Subjected to neverending mental and physical tortures, inmates “didn’t even have the right to die” in order to escape their ordeal. ([source](#)).



__According to a Report for to the Presidential Commission regarding the communist dictatorship, communism made over 2 million victims in Romania. According to Vladimir Bukovsky, in the initial stages the communist dictatorships “destroyed 10% of the population” regardless of the country they occupied; most of the victims perished in the post-WW2 decade. Prisons all across the country were filled with prisoners ranging from academic and government elite to peasants and ordinary citizens. New prison facilities were built or transformed to accommodate the large numbers of political prisoners. The intellectual and military elite was exterminated while few escaped by taking refuge in Western Europe.

During this period, many prisons did not release death certificates and did not notify families about their family members’ death. Bodies were buried in mass graves or cremated. When deaths were officially registered, they were often classified as “natural death”, when in fact the death had occurred as a result of beatings, cold, hunger and other inhumane conditions. When severe torture was involved, suicide was a common option for inmates.

The prison guards were selected from among common prisoners (i.e. non-political prisoners); they were selected based on the degree of violence that they could reach.



Fort XIII Jilava

In 1965, Nicolae Ceausescu came to power. In the early 1960's, the political stage was reinvigorated by a series of reforms throughout eastern Europe which, among other things, lead to an amnesty which freed all political prisoners and cancelled death sentences across Communist Europe. All too little, too late for the victims of the violent political oppression.

Today, the post-war communist oppression is rarely debated in schools and the media. To overcome this shortcoming, a petition was made by ex-communist states – the Prague Declaration.

The petition included proposals for “the introduction of legislation that would enable courts of law to judge and sentence perpetrators of Communist crimes and to compensate victims of Communism”, in the same manner that Holocaust victims were compensated for seven decades. The petition was rejected by the European Union – see [EU rejects eastern states’ call to outlaw denial of crimes by communist regimes](#).

www.loc.gov/law/foreign-news/article/european-union-rejection-of-eastern-european-states-call-to-hold-communist-crimes-to-same-standard-as-nazi-crimes

The petition received an official answer in the form of the Seventy Years Declaration, made by Jewish organizations against the Prague Declaration.

www.seventyyearsdeclaration.org/what-its-about

The Seventy Years Declaration dismisses attempts to put other crimes against humanity on the same scale with the Holocaust. Today, the denial of Holocaust crimes is illegal in 15 European countries and its punishable by law.

Aiud prison



Aiud Ordeal – monument built next to Aiud communist prison. It symbolizes the “temple of pain supported by crosses”.



Aiud prisoner – Arsenie Papacioc before his arrest

Quote from Arsenie Papacioc's book, Christian Orthodox priest held prisoner at Aiud:

"Nothing helped me more in life than the suffering. Suffering alone is the greatest church. I'm certain that the angels were envious of us (the martyrs) because they don't have this pain which was beyond us.

Yes, because you didn't know if you were going to live until the next day. This extraordinary state of tension gave you the power to know yourself truly. This state didn't last for days, but for years on end.

It was a regime of extermination. They could've just shot us but they preferred to kill us slowly, without leaving any traces. It was horrible but I survived!

You don't know how precious freedom is. Since God left us this freedom, we have to live every moment to its fullness. To know yourself. Which is one of the biggest mistakes in life? The human being isolates itself... We have this great privilege, but also this great responsibility. It's very bad to not live with a purpose. Every low point gives purpose to an ideal."



Aurel Aldea



Nicolae Ciupercă



Iosif Iacobici



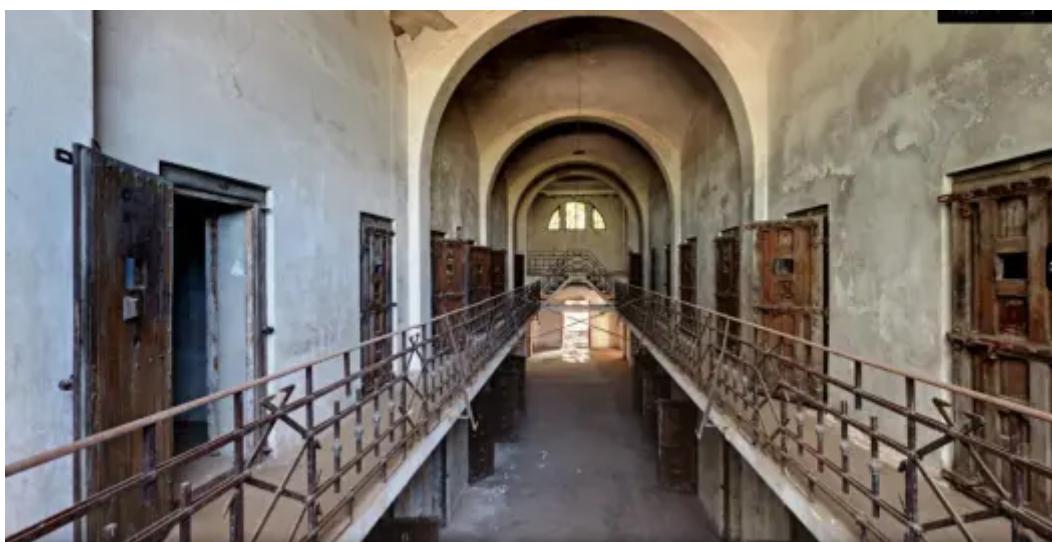
Emanoil Leoveanu

Four of the many political prisoners who died in Aiud. .



Remains uncovered near Aiud prison by IICCR, which were later laid to rest inside the Aiud Ordeal memorial museum.

Ramnicu Sarat prison



www.ramnicusarat.iiccr.ro

Website offers a virtual tour of the prison, with the voice of ex-prisoner Corneliu Coposu in the background describing his ordeal. Corneliu Coposu was a member of the National Peasant party and was imprisoned without trial for 9 years, after which he was again sentenced to life imprisonment for so called "crimes against communist reforms". In 1964 he was released. His wife, also imprisoned, died in 1965 due to illness contracted in prison.



Corneliu Coposu, prisoner and survivor of Rm Sarat prison, testified in his memories "Five or six guards would enter the cell with bats and start beating the prisoners one by one, without any justification, until they fell to the ground. All the inmates, regardless of age or state of health, were beaten methodically."



Corneliu Coposu's description:

"Ramnicu prison was best characterized not by fear or hunger but by the isolation which I cannot describe in words. Imagine this small room where you are locked up 24/7, for years on end, not allowed to do anything and at the smallest mistake you're being beaten. [...] You keep rewinding your life, all your memories – but more than anything you feel a regret about things you would've been living now but you can't because you're wasting your life away. You start building up future life plans and create an entire universe in your mind. You go insane... Even now I still have the tendency to "walk around in my cell", go around in circles like I did in my 2 meters cell."



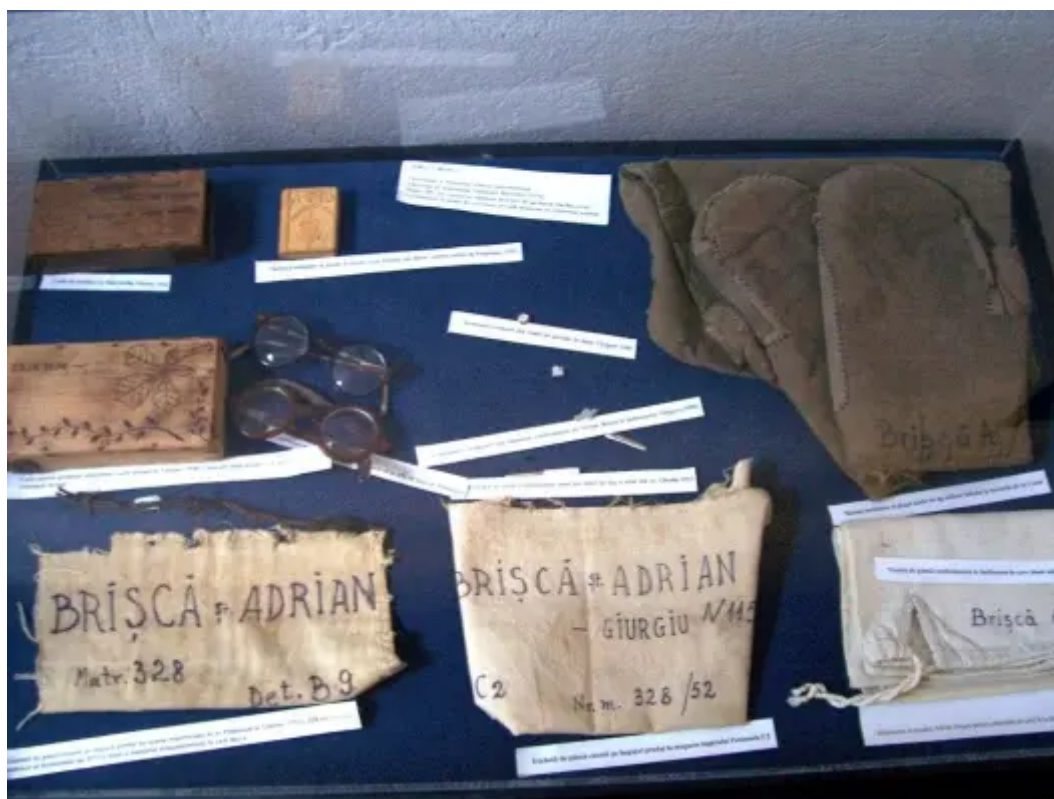
"Izolare" (isolation) written above the door

Sighetu Marmatiei prison

www.memorialsighet.ro



Names of the victims inscribed on the walls



Personal belongings.

Florin Constantin Pavlovici – prisoner at Sighetu prison

Born on 14 March 1936 in Botosani in a family of teachers, Florin Pavlovici graduated in 1958 from the Faculty of Philosophy with a degree in Journalism. A bright future was awaiting him but in February 1959 he was arrested on charges of “counter-revolutionary plot” and his dreams were shattered. He was convicted by the Bucharest Military Court to five years in prison for “conspiracy against the (communist) social order”. He was locked up in Jilava and Gherla prisons and did forced labor in the camps of Giurgeni, Periprava and Salcia .

Florin wrote a book about his prison experience – **“Torture, on everyone’s understanding”**. The book starts with a few words : “Dedicated to all the investigators, informers, prosecutors, prison guards, and to everyone who contributed to the human degradation”.



Interview extract from Adevarul newspaper:

Punishments depended on the imagination of the guards

How were the prisoners punished? We know that beatings were the most widespread means of rehabilitation for political prisoners.

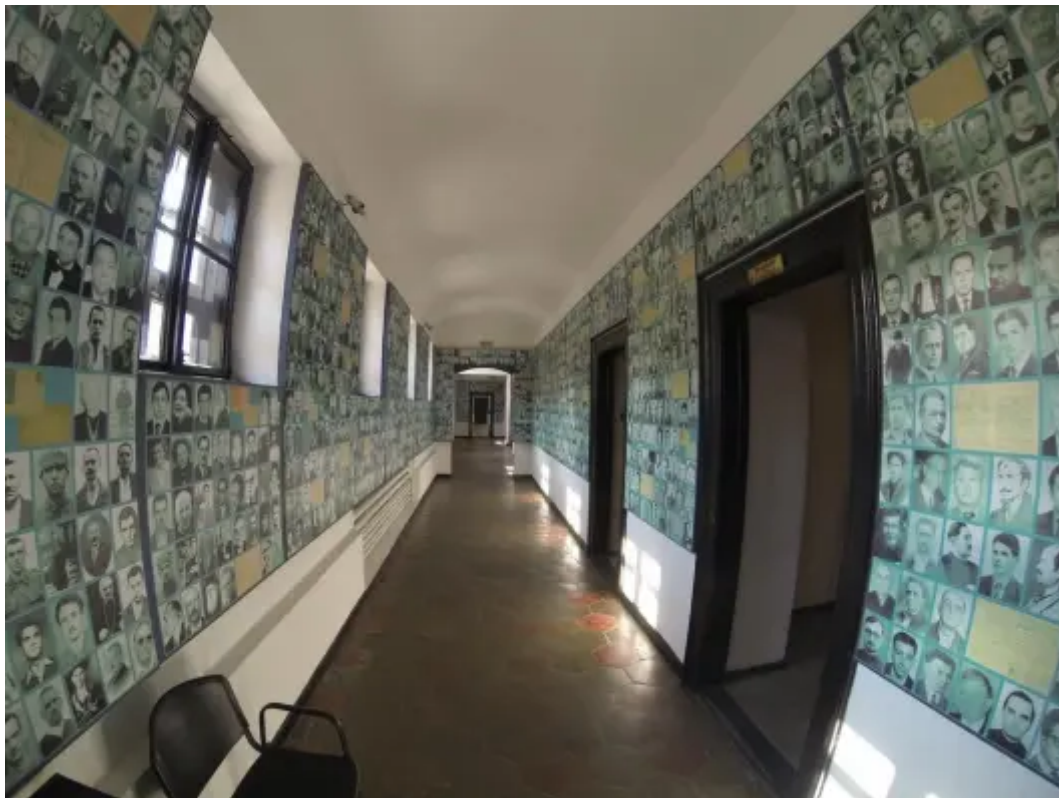
Florin Pavlovici: There were two types of punishments. The so-called regulatory penalties. You were given 3-6 days in the isolation room. Or more. This prison cell was a narrow concrete room with no windows, just a door. You received one slice of bread and a cup of water every 2 days.

Did you have any bed or chair?

It wasn't a lounge, it was a punishment room. Your question is really insulting to the (communist) government ... You couldn't even sit down on the cement. It was very risky, you could get sick from the cold.

When detainees were sick, were they taken to a doctor?

There were so many sick that the doctor reached only the most serious cases. In November-December 1959, 60 prisoners died in a month because of illness caused by the inhumane conditions.



What was the second type of punishment?

The second type of punishment depended on the imagination of the guards. That meant beatings with clubs and shovels. They hit you wherever they could, but especially in the head. It was an organized beating.

What you were punished for the most?

Punishments were given mainly for failing to dig your daily norm (forced labor). I remember this captain who used to check on us, nobody knew his name. He was very young. The writer I.D. Sirbu had found a nickname for him. [...] He had very beautiful boots, made of leather. They were being polished regularly. And if he didn't have someone to do that, he'd always find someone among the "bandits" (political prisoners) to polish them.



Potholes for "loan"

What were these pits?

They were holes that we dug in the ground and we took the soil to the pier. We built dams around Braila city. There were about 100,000 hectares. The dams were started in 1949 by political prisoners. The pit was measured to see if we do our daily norm. The daily norm for each detainee was 3.2 cubic meters. It is a huge amount even for those who were well-fed and accustomed to such work. It was hard to reach the daily norm.

Were there certain inmates who were sympathized?

Sure, they were the informers. They were simple servants.

Communist prisons decimated Romania's political, military and cultural elite. What political prisoners were detained with you?

The old politicians had already been exterminated in the 1950's. The majority of us were arrested after the "Hungary generation" (Hungarian anti-communist revolution in 1956, smothered in blood by Soviet tanks and ignored by the West). We were called "ungariști".



“Ungariștii” political prisoners were the only ones there?

No, there were also many peasants who had opposed collectivization. There were entire villages from Vrancea. Almost the entire village Răstoaca was in this in jail.

What personalities did you meet in prison?

There was one doctor, Sergiu George, who passed away. He was a brilliant Orientalist. After release from prison he published several studies of Sanskrit. He inherited the library of Mircea Eliade. They didn't know each other personally, Eliade only knew his reputation as a scholar and gave him his library through his sister. I also met the Greek-Catholic priest Matei Boila, nephew of Iuliu Maniu (prime-minister who died in Sighet prison). A wonderful character. I remember him working at the pier. He was tall and thin, almost skeletal, he could barely stand up from weakness. He was such a strong believer, that even those who didn't believe in God joined him when he sang “Ave Maria”.

Beatings, “a scientific work”

You talked of captain “smack”. Why did you call him that?

The captain was measuring the pits. In a pit, two men were working. One was digging and another one carrying 2-300 meters of soil on wooden planks. Further, prisoners were swapped. If he saw that one didn't reach the norm, the captain would say “Hit him! 10 smacks! “Or 20, depending on what he felt was better. In the evening, while returning to the colony, there were 50-60 men sitting in a row, waiting to be punished.

Have you been punished many times?

One time I was asked to dig near a road leading to the village Agaua. And I got near the road. The ground was so hard that it was very difficult to dig. So for a month I couldn't reach my norm and I was

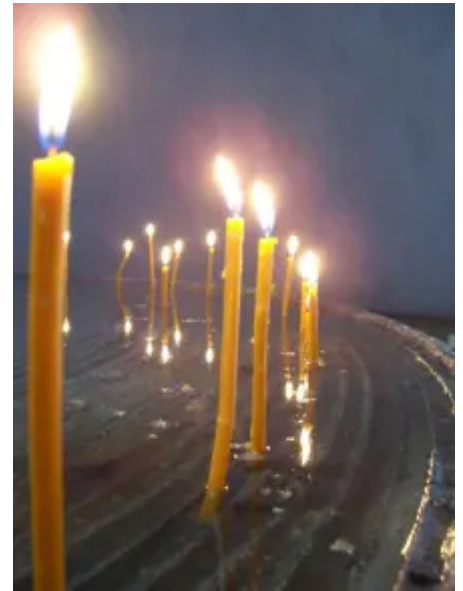
beaten every night.

How did you bear the ordeal?

At first, I sat among the last in the row and let the others in. I did not dare, I was afraid ... Eventually, I had to go. After ten days of beatings, I changed the method: I went among the first ones to get out faster.

What happened in private punishment? Who enforced the beatings?

There were a few guys from security forces, they were soldiers. They were guarding us when we went to work. They were the ones holding us and the guards were beating us up. They put a wet sheet on the bottom so that the blood vessels wouldn't break. One of them was beating us very often, he took pleasure in it. It was a competition between the guards to take the belt and beat us.



Do you remember the first punishment? How did you feel then?

I will remember it all my life. It shocked me the most. I held myself hard so I wouldn't scream. I was able to bear the first few hits. After the tenth hit, I snatched from the hands of the guards. They immobilized me and continued to hit me over and over again. I screamed at each blow. The pain was so big that I couldn't help but scream.

Some inmates fainted from pain. It was like scientific work. The beating was systematic, but the bandits (political prisoners) were not killed, they had to be kept alive as long as possible so they can suffer. In addition, we were labor. The beating was considered a stimulant for our work performance.



Pickles and “adobo” soup

The labor camps were infamous for endemic hunger.

That’s right. For example, 1.200 political prisoners were fed with 12 kilograms of beans. That means 10 grams per detainee.

What was the daily food in the colony work?

Let me tell you what I received. In the morning, 100 grams of bread and a cup of something black, I think it was chickpeas. The ration of sugar never reached us. It was stolen hierarchically from warehouseman to the guards.

And for lunch?

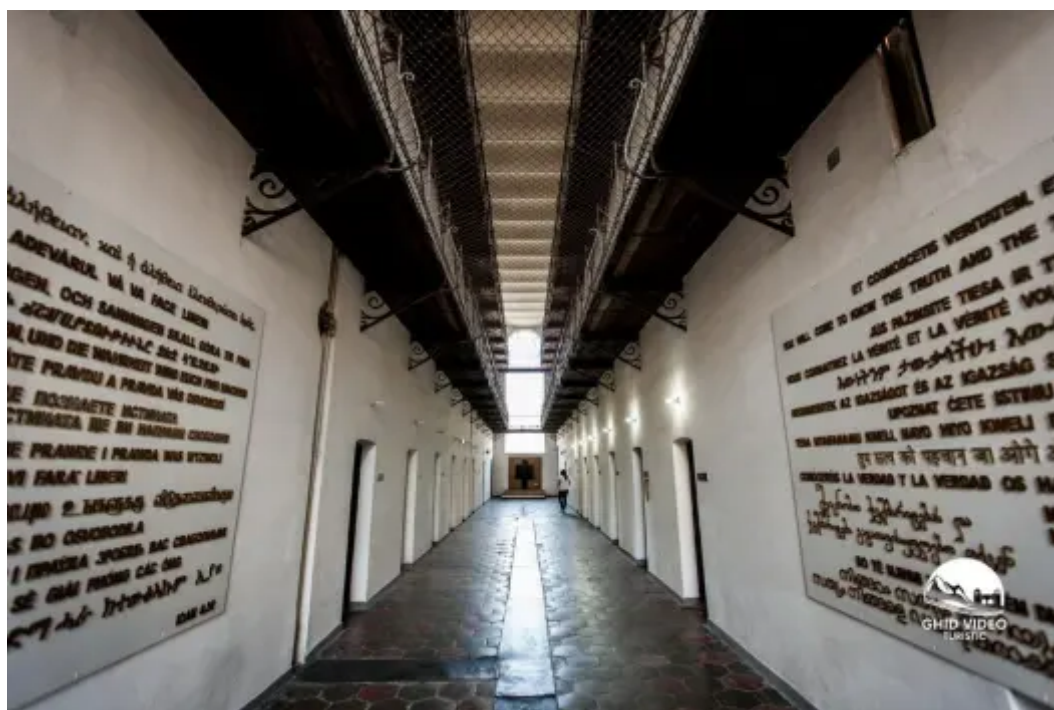
At noon, when we were working at the pier, we received soup. It was brought in a large barrel with a chariot. With a terrible hunger, we’d look into the distance to see when the chariot was arriving. An alarm would announce it... we’d receive one portion of soup.

What kind of soup?

For months in 1959, the soup was made of pickles only. They had barrels of old rotten pickles. They were put in a boiler and boiled, then given to us to eat. With the soup they also gave us 200 grams of polenta. It was shared to two people. In the evening, we received another portion of pickles soup.

The food was the same every day or were there better days?

On a good day, we received barley. And raw meat if any horse died. When a horse collapsed, it was put in the boiler.



“Truth will set you free” written in various languages in the prison facility

Pitesti “educational prison”

The Pitesti prison facility carried out an experiment on its prisoners by trying to re-educate them into accepting communism as an ideology. The re-education process involved beatings that lasted from several hours to several days, and also mental and physical torture. Mental torture included forcing inmates to compromise friends and family members even if it meant making up false information, acknowledge examples of deviant behavior from family and friends, insult and torture their fellow inmates and so on – things that would break them mentally in such a way that they would either lose themselves or transform into a new being, capable of grotesque behavior. Many inmates did not survive the extreme tortures.

The experiment began with regular interrogation and prisoners were locked up with friendly inmates, to whom they’d eventually open up and confess. Unexpectedly, on the order “attack” - the inmate would be assaulted and beaten – which lasted from a few hours to a few days. Shocked, startled and terrorized, this first episode of their ordeal would assure that the inmate would break down mentally.



Memorialul Durerii (Memorial of Pain) documentary – in an episode dedicated to the infamous prison chief Alexandru Nicholschi – a former prisoner at Pitesti named Constantin Barba testified: “I personally witnessed the deaths of 5 inmates: Balanescu, Bogdanovici, Nita Cornel , and 2 others – Serban Gheorghe and Vatasoiu – who threw themselves on the stairs right in my face.

Their despair was so big, that I believe if they had the chance, most of the inmates wouldve killed themselves. I tried to commit suicide too when I realized that you can never get out of here alive. I slashed my wrists – this saved me morally because I wasn't forced anymore to beat up others.. If I were



Alexandru Nicolschi (real name Boris Grunberg), one of the main organizers and supervisors of the Pitesti experiment

to tell you how these people were terrorized and tortured, you wouldn't believe me.

I don't have enough imagination for the kind of tortures they applied. I'll give you an example – Bogdanovici was seated on his knees with his head pushed forward, and Turcanu would kick him and move his jaw in one side, then turn around and kick his jaw in the other side. Before dying, Bogdanovici had no teeth anymore and, medically speaking, he had gone insane.”



Fort XIII Jilava

Fort XIII Jilava was built around Bucharest as a defense line in the XIX century. The Communists transformed it into a prison facility camp in 1949. Valentin Cantor, a fresh college graduate who was arrested in 1952 for complaining about the abuses carried out during the collectivization process:

“We had heard something about Jilava but no one knew much, it was kept a secret. The cells were overcrowded. After a while, our numbers decreased as prisoners died. Bed? We didnt have a bed. There was an inmate on the right side and one on the left. We didnt sleep on our backs because there wasn’t enough room, we slept on one side. When we wanted to turn around, we’d give a certain command for everyone to move.

Every day, everyone was waiting for the lunch. We were obsessed with this moment of the day because of the hunger. We were divided in two groups: those who couldnt stand hearing discussions about food, and those who couldnt stop speaking about food. Some had this ugly tendency to look into the other inmate’s bowl to see if the portion of food was bigger than theirs. The hunger brought out the animal in you... other inmates were able to overcome this hard moment and they’d give away their food portion to those who were weaker physically.

One way for them to torture us was for instance, if someone who was sentenced to death was pardoned, he wouldnt be told for months. Every time he’d be taken out of the cell, he’d think he’s being taken to the execution spot.

In the spring, there was a little swallow bird who was flying around prospecting whether to build a nest near our cell. For us inside the cell, it was a big event to watch it. Because it was as if – look, someone is free...”



“If you want to live, put straws under your clothes”

“If you want to live, put straws under your clothes” – writings from Fort XIII Jilava walls. The straws were meant to protect one’s body from the severe beatings. Wednesday was a “beating day” in Jilava.

The inmates were taken out for walks for 15 minutes once every two weeks. The food consisted of one daily portion of polenta mixed with barley. A way for inmates to keep their mental sanity was to teach each other whatever they knew. Mathematicians, teachers, linguists etc would spread their knowledge to fellow inmates.



thought on “Communist prisons: Fort XIII Jilava, Ramnicu-Sarat, Sighetu Marmatiei, Pitesti”

1. *said:anonymous*

December 2, 2015 at 13:46

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